

Phoenix Special School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	135227
Local Authority	Bradford
Inspection number	364042
Inspection dates	10–11 May 2011
Reporting inspector	Kath Halifax

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	2–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	60
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Alan Caygill
Headteacher	Mr Gary Bowden
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 14 lessons or parts of lessons taught by eight different teachers. Further time was spent looking at pupils' records, work books, and information about pupils' progress. Inspectors held meetings with leaders, governors, staff, pupils, parents and carers, and other professionals. They looked at the school's review of its work, the current development plan, minutes of governors' meetings, and documentation to ensure pupils are safe. The responses to 18 parental questionnaires were analysed.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- The reliability and effectiveness of assessment in demonstrating progress.
- Whether the provision for pupils with a gift or talent is effective.
- The effectiveness of the provision in ensuring the well-being and skills maintenance of pupils with life-limiting or degenerative conditions.
- The success with which leaders have created a sense of unity and in driving school improvement.

Information about the school

Phoenix Special School opened in April 2010 under the local authority reorganisation of its provision for pupils with special educational needs. The school shares the same building as Merlin Top Primary School and was officially federated in January 2011. The school opened with staff from seven different schools. Similarly pupils are from 18 different settings. The number of pupils is growing as pupils are gradually introduced into the school. It is planned to be at full capacity for the start of the next school year. Almost a half of pupils have profound and multiple learning needs, one third have severe needs, and the remaining pupils have autism. All have a statement to meet their special educational needs. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is above average. Though the majority of pupils are of White British or European heritages, over one third is of South East Asian heritage. Almost all pupils speak English as the principal language at home.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

This is a good school that has come a long way in the very short time that it has been open. Despite the challenges of settling pupils from a number of schools and addressing their parents' and carers' significant concerns, leaders have successfully created a school that embraces all learners and enables all abilities to make progress.

As a result of the outstanding management of teaching, including first-rate training, staff from very different backgrounds have a good understanding of teaching pupils with a wide range of complex needs. Expectations of pupils are high and consequently achievement is good. Teachers and support staff work effectively together as a team and are aware of how individual pupils learn. However, while many staff use signs and symbols to aid the communication of pupils with autism and more profound needs, this is not always consistent. Similarly, opportunities are missed to use symbols in displays around the school. Furthermore, opportunities to extend the vocabulary of the most-able pupils are sometimes overlooked.

Pupils' behaviour is excellent. Through daily routines and an extensive programme, pupils make remarkable gains in their spiritual, moral and cultural development, but their social development is held back because sometimes adults exercise too much direction and control during pupils' free time. Furthermore, though pupils have a voice through the annual review process, there is no school council. Pupils have an outstanding understanding of keeping safe. They are developing a healthy lifestyle well, but do not always have the opportunity to take their break outdoors.

Leaders know the school in fine detail. Their vision, enthusiasm and wealth of knowledge are inspirational to their colleagues. The rigorous monitoring of classroom practice is improving pupils' progress. Considerable information has been collected recording pupils' achievements and tracking their progress. Though the school has been part of a federation for only a few months, the primary school is already benefitting from the expertise within Phoenix; pupils have enjoyed joint ventures and proposals have been put forward for the next school year. Leaders know the priorities that will lift achievement and these are having an effect, for example in the far more accurate assessment. Self-evaluation is precise. Effective structures and communication systems within school ensure all staff keep abreast of developments and feel valued and part of a team. These good aspects of leadership and management reflect the school's good capacity to continue to improve.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve pupils' communication by:
 - making more consistent use of signs and symbols

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- ensuring displays feature symbols and child-friendly vocabulary
- challenging more-able pupils to respond using phrases rather than single words.
- Enable pupils to have greater independence by:
 - ensuring adults stand back and let pupils take more control of their free time
 - setting up a school council
 - ensuring pupils have opportunities to spend some of their leisure time outdoors.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Pupils' successes are mostly in very small steps, but taking account of individual starting points, their progress is good. During lessons, they are eager to give of their best and take pleasure in all that is on offer. As a consequence, they are lengthening their concentration span, improving their observational skills and making good all-round progress. Pupils make good progress because activities are meaningful. For example, more-able pupils studying the solar system boarded their 'space ship' and donned their 'helmets' as they 'flew' around the corridors locating the planets prior to recording their findings on paper. Equally, pupils with more profound needs made good progress in music when they listened to a lively piece of music, grinning with joy as they made their 'insects' dance and linking the activity to their science topic of 'mini-beasts'.

As a result of staff knowledge and good resources, pupils with autism are making good progress both academically and socially. Pupils who, prior to coming to the school had worked in isolation because of inappropriate behaviour, now work alongside their peers with no disruption to the learning of others. Through excellent partnerships with health agencies, and with parents and carers, pupils with degenerative and life-limiting conditions continue to receive a valuable education enabling them to maintain skills and have an improved quality of life. Attendance is broadly average. When pupils are recovering from surgery or are too ill to come into school, adults work with families to ensure continuity in their learning.

Pupils delight in their time in school, overcoming barriers such as chronic health conditions, mobility difficulties and communication needs to make the best of every opportunity. They care about each other and try to give of their best at all times. As the result of very good behaviour plans, those with complex behavioural needs are more aware of consequences and respond exceptionally well to the expectations and role models provided by adults.

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These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account:	*
Pupils' attainment ¹	
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
Pupils' behaviour	1
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

* In some special schools inspectors do not make a judgement about attainment in relation to expectations of the pupils' age.

How effective is the provision?

Teachers and support staff work very effectively as a team and have an in-depth knowledge of the needs and conditions of the pupils. They plan conscientiously to provide and challenge the differing abilities each class. The three rooms that make up each group 'base' are managed very effectively to maximise learning opportunities. Teachers are imaginative in the activities they provide. Very good use is made of real objects to ensure learning is meaningful and fun. Music is used most effectively to engage pupils who find concentration and new experiences difficult. Overall, adults provide a good level of challenge for more-able pupils, questioning them to make them think, but opportunities are sometimes missed to widen the vocabulary of these pupils, and to encourage them to speak in phrases and sentences. Initially, many members of staff had limited experience of observing pupils and accurately recording their achievement, compounding insecurities regarding pupils' attainment on joining the school. Following high-quality training for all staff, assessment is now accurate. As a result of more precise observations conducted more frequently, the smallest achievements are now recorded in all subjects. These are successfully built upon in lessons and this is increasing pupils' rate of progress.

The curriculum is good and personalised to meet the needs of individual pupils. The way pupils are grouped, imaginative use of the 'bases', and the innovative ways subjects are

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taught make a significant contribution to pupils' progress and achievement. As all subjects are taught concurrently, meticulous tracking is in place to ensure a balance is maintained and that there are no gaps in learning. Pupils' personal development is fostered through opportunities to work as part of a group as well as on an intensive individual learning programme. Pupils revel in enrichment opportunities for sport and the creative arts. Adults are adept at identifying individual pupils' strengths, for example in poetry or basketball, but there are no formal systems to identify pupils who may have a gift or talent.

All staff have an exhaustive knowledge of the pupils and effective links with parents and carers have improved attendance. Suitable arrangements are in place in preparation for pupils' transfer to secondary school, but these have yet to be tested. The work of the 'care team' in providing support for pupils and their families is exemplary. In addition, excellent links with a range of health and other professionals meet the diverse needs of pupils, including those with degenerative and life-limiting conditions. For example, when necessary, staff are working with parents and carers to draw up end-of-life care plans. All adults have undertaken a substantial amount of training to support and care for their pupils. While an increasing number are experts, some are still embedding their practice.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

Leaders are clear and determined in their pursuit of excellence and have the skill and enthusiasm to achieve it. They have identified hidden talents in many staff and helped them to blossom. Through outstanding professional training they have raised the quality of teaching, pupils' learning, and the career aspirations of staff. This has resulted in a school whose common aims, understanding and culture are evident in its orderly, harmonious community. Imaginative use is made for the well-designed building. In order to help pupils settle quickly, leaders ensured all pupils had a least one known adult in their base. Specialist resources have been purchased to successfully tackle any possible discrimination and ensure each pupil has equality of opportunity regardless of need. The care and thought that leadership put into planning is evident within each base and in pupils' well-being and academic gains. Leaders provide good opportunities for pupils to be aware of community cohesion. Pupils and staff enjoy cultural and creative experiences that reflect and celebrate its diverse population.

Governance is good. The federated school has a single governing body. Members of the governing body are very knowledgeable about the education of pupils with special educational needs and robustly hold the school to account. The staffing committee is now in the process of appointing a further senior leader to reduce the very heavy workload of

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the headteacher and deputy. Members of the governing body take their responsibilities seriously, particularly in ensuring the health, safety and well-being of pupils and staff. At the time of the inspection, good arrangements were in place to safeguard pupils. Considerable thought has gone into making the school a community resource with Phoenix now open 52 weeks a year to give local residents and pupils' families access to its high-quality resources. Plans are well-advanced to become a forest school adding a further valuable resource to the surrounding urban area.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	1
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Early Years Foundation Stage

Children enjoy their time in the Early Years Foundation Stage. They make good progress in all areas of learning because of the good provision. Teaching is good with a suitable balance between adult-led and child-centred activities that cater well for children's academic achievements and well-being. Planning is detailed and activities skilfully take account of individual children's speech and physiotherapy programmes. Adults are accurate in their assessment but while their observations of children's achievements are detailed, the records do not always refer to the levels or stages children have attained. Nevertheless, the selection of photographs included in children's 'learning journeys' provide an enjoyable record for parents and carers.

The leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage are good. All the welfare requirements are met. Good links are being developed with parents and carers, and outstanding links have been established with health professionals and other agencies to ensure children's well-being. Adults regularly 'go the extra mile' to support children and their families. Staff make extremely good use of the federation and several joint activities with the primary school take place each week. The most popular with children is the

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shared lunchtime play. As soon as the gate opens, children from Phoenix and the primary school mix freely and play alongside each other happily.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2

Views of parents and carers

Almost one third of the parents and carers responded to the questionnaire, which is a typical return for special schools. Most responses were positive. In addition, parents and carers attending annual review meetings told inspectors that they are impressed by how quickly their children have settled and by the progress they are making. The inspection evidence endorses the strengths identified by parents and carers. While most parents and carers agree they are kept informed of their child's progress, a small number would like to see improved communications. Inspectors investigated and found good links with parents and carers. The school has an 'open-door' policy. Parents and carers are invited to meet with staff each half term to set new targets and they attend the annual review of their children's education. Parents and carers receive a weekly newsletter, and salient points are recorded in the school-to-home diary.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Phoenix Special School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 18 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 60 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	15	83	3	17	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	14	78	4	22	0	0	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	10	56	6	33	2	11	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	12	67	4	22	1	6	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	13	72	4	22	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	8	44	9	50	1	6	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	11	61	6	33	1	6	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	7	39	7	39	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	14	78	4	22	0	0	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	10	56	7	39	0	0	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	9	50	5	28	1	6	1	6
The school is led and managed effectively	13	72	4	22	1	6	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	15	83	3	17	0	0	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
Type of school	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	46	48	6	0
Primary schools	6	47	40	7
Secondary schools	12	39	38	11
Sixth forms	13	42	41	3
Special schools	28	49	19	4
Pupil referral units	14	45	31	10
All schools	10	46	37	7

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 December 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



11 May 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Phoenix Special School, Keighley BD22 6HZ

I'm sure you will remember that a little while ago, a colleague and I spent a short time looking at your school. Thank you for the very warm welcome you gave us. We enjoyed talking to you and visiting your lessons. We especially enjoyed being shown around the new building and hearing your plans for the grounds, and we were very moved by your assembly. Thank you for taking time to give us your views of school. It was clear from our chats and the questionnaire replies we received from your families that you enjoy school and think that you are safe and well cared for.

Your school is providing you with a good education. You have fun in lessons and in your lunchtime clubs. You are very well-behaved and work hard. Your progress is good from your starting points. All this happens because you have forward-thinking leaders and good teachers. You are especially well cared for, particularly those of you who have medical problems. It is good to see your excellent understanding of keeping safe.

There are a couple of areas that would make your school even better. We have asked your teachers to:

- make sure they always remember to use signs and symbols to help with your communication
- give you a bit more freedom, especially at break times.

We know you will do all you can to help your teachers and wish you every success in your future.

Yours sincerely,

Katharine Halifax
Lead Inspector

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